

Chapter 6

IMPROVING A DESIRABLE COMMUNITY

What is a desirable community?

**What draws people to stake their future in
Lexington?**



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A desirable community is a place where tourists want to visit, new companies want to relocate, and residents want to live for a long time. Lexington is known as a desirable place to live. From its excellent health care and higher educational opportunities to its strong neighborhoods and beautiful landscapes, Lexington is a showcase of opportunity for a desirable community.

A [Knight Foundation survey](#) published in 2011 found that three main qualities attach people to place:

- ❖ **Social offerings** (entertainment venues and places to meet)
- ❖ **Openness** (how welcoming a place is)
- ❖ **Aesthetics** (its physical beauty and green spaces)

As a desirable place to live, Lexington possesses these qualities because of our strong urban form, thriving neighborhoods, and vibrant commerce. As the survey discovered, not all of the the qualities that make a community desirable are tangible. To keep the desirable assets and improve the areas where change is needed takes a broad understanding of the interrelated systems and shared values that affect place making.

While every community needs good transportation, health networks, and jobs, a desirable community goes beyond utilitarian infrastructure and services. The basis for place making at a community scale begins with a sustainable urban form.

Place making

Place making as a means to desirable community begins with a vision that is achieved through public consensus. Lexington is fortunate that

its residents recognize that their community has a strong sense of place and cultural presence. They share in their values to keep its unique identity, historic building, neighborhoods, and landscapes.

There are many assets in Lexington from which to build upon the shared vision. The three qualities - social offerings, openness, and aesthetics - can be found here. Private revitalization of city blocks become venues from entertainment and places to meet. Downtown has successfully become more attractive after streetscape improvements.

To be more desirable, Lexington must shape and design its public spaces (and facilities for semi-public and private spaces) with an eye towards delivering the intangible qualities that people seek. Place making at a community scale begins with a sustainable urban form. Social offerings, openness and aesthetics along with civic and social capital, public health, cultural expression, environmental health, and economic vitality are all influenced by a city's organizational structure.

Therefore, planning the urban form should provide more than the rudimentary functions of moving people and goods, or deciding where buildings are located. Examples of the importance of urban form in shaping a desirable community, and how land use planning and design can enable place making include:

- ❖ **Walkability** - dependent upon not just the presence of a sidewalk, but also features that invite and encourage walking, such as block length, directness, setbacks, and attractive streetscape design.
- ❖ **Destinations** - accessible by trails, bike lanes, and transit where appropriate and for people with disabilities.

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- ❖ Place making - encourages locating transit stops for convenience and designing them to be welcoming places.
- ❖ Sustainable agriculture and cultural landscape
- ❖ Context sensitive - street cross-sections that respond to land use; parks that respond to population they serve; and natural resources that are sufficiently buffered for their protection.
- ❖ Public spaces - streets, parks, schools, plazas and buildings should be located and designed to be inspiring, safe, inviting, and attractive.

Transportation

How does Transportation contribute to a Desirable Community?

- ❖ Provide safe roads for pedestrians and all users
- ❖ Reduce traffic congestion and travel time
- ❖ provide accessible and viable alternatives to car travel

What does the 2013 Comprehensive Plan recommend?

- ❖ Include innovative strategies, such as Double Crossover Diamond intersections and roundabouts in ROW design
- ❖ Expand transit
- ❖ Retrofit existing road network for bicyclists

Providing people with safe, efficient, multimodal transportation is vital to Lexington's livability. This requires coordinated land use and transportation planning, particularly with respect to encouraging travel by means other than personal automobile. Walking, bicycling, and

public transit are low-cost, efficient, and healthy ways of moving about the community and play a key role in a desirable and sustainable city.

A person's decision to bicycle, walk, or ride the bus is influenced by many factors. The availability of sidewalks, bicycleways and transit amenities are one consideration; however, community design also significantly impacts people's choices. Pedestrians and bicyclists are sensitive to the surrounding environment. They generally dislike too-long trip distances and desire streets and walkways that connect them to nearby destinations as directly as possible. Pedestrians also enjoy streetscapes that provide visual interest, shade trees, and adequate separation from traffic. These qualities can be achieved through complete streets design practices.

Community design, including land use patterns, building orientation and architecture strongly influence how people choose to travel. Sound planning guidance encourages communities to examine characteristics such as density, diversity of uses, design, distance to transit, destinations, development scale, demographics, and demand management (or the 8Ds) to determine their effect on travel demand. Walkable development practices encourage a mix of land uses, a variety of housing types, and higher densities that make communities more compact and walkable. Neighborhood-oriented retail and commercial centers allow store and services to be located near where people live. Schools and park nearby that are accessible by foot also encourage neighborhood children to bicycle and walk to them. Greenspace, natural areas, public art, pedestrian-oriented store fronts, tree-lined streets, and active civic spaces encourage and enhance the walking experience.

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The MPO's [Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan](#) addresses strategies for multimodal transportation. It includes a community-wide inventory of bicycle and pedestrian facilities and identifies gaps in the complete streets network. Currently, 33 percent of arterial streets do not have sidewalks (compared to 38 percent in 2007) and 11 percent have sidewalks on only one side of the streets (compared to 15 percent in 2007). The plan notes that retrofitting these arterials with sidewalks during new development and redevelopment is critical to completing the arterial sidewalk system and improving pedestrian safety. Lexington has 28.8 miles of bicycle lanes (up from 12 miles in 2007) and 22.9 miles of shared use trails (up from 8 miles in 2007). The Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan prioritizes the improvements that are needed along collector and arterial streets to safely and more comfortably accommodate bicycle and pedestrian travel.

Greenway trails that are well integrated with on-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities contribute to a balanced, convenient and desirable non-motorized transportation system. Trail facilities provide connections not offered by the roadway system and can reduce trip length. Trail facilities connect key destinations and offer bicycling and walking opportunities in natural and scenic environments. The [Greenway Master Plan](#) provides the framework for trail development in Fayette County.

With respect to new streets, the comprehensive plan shows the general location of new collector streets that will connect with the arterial system. The major roadway network in Lexington's Urban Service Area is essentially set, although there are a number of proposed roads across undeveloped parcels or planned as part of redevelopment.

Constructing these unfinished segments will complete the arterial and collector road network in the Urban Service Area. This does not, however, mean that opportunities for system improvement have been foreclosed. For example, in 2011, an award-winning, first-of-its-kind

Image 6.1 Double Crossover Diamond



Image from www.transportation.ky.gov

safety and operational plan was implemented at New Circle and Harrodsburg Roads with the construction of the [double crossover diamond](#) interchange. A new reverse-lane scheme was introduced at Man o War and Nicholasville Road to improve operations. There is ongoing evaluation of the cost and benefits of returning Lexington's downtown streets to two-way traffic. Within the constraints of a set roadway network, there exists numerous opportunities for improvement - improvements that support a desirable community.

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Traffic congestion is an ever present concern for residents and visitors. Growing population and increased travel demand on the transportation system can begin to maximize roadway capacity for vehicular travel. The Federal Highway Administration defines congestion as the level at which transportation system performance is no longer acceptable due to decreased speeds and increased travel times. The FHWA defines bottlenecks as a point or location where traffic demand exceeds the normal capacity. Impressions of congestion vary by location and land use. At any given time, a driver has different expectation for congestion on Lexington's Main Street versus Nicholasville Road versus New Circle Road.

To address congestion and bottlenecks, the [Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act \(MAP-21\)](#) of 2012, the Federal transportation authorization bill, requires that a Congestion Management Process (CMP) be part of the metropolitan planning process. There are three categories of strategies that are considered within the CMP: Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies, Traffic Operational Management (TOM) strategies, and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) strategies.

Transportation demand management, traffic demand management or travel demand management (all TDM) is the application of strategies and policies to reduce travel demand (specifically that of single occupancy vehicles), or to redistribute this demand in space or in time. Examples of TDM include community growth management, improved transit services, and rideshare programs.

Examples of TOM strategies are roadway access management, improved traffic signs/signals and intersection improvements. Examples of TIP strategies are additional traffic lanes, interchange redesign improvements, and variable lane use.

All these strategies recognize that widening roadways to add more vehicular capacity is not always the best or most effective solution. With limited funding available, the emphasis is on preserving, maintaining, and getting the most out of the transportation system we have. Innovations for roadway system improvement and fresh thinking about planning, management, and financing strategies that help decision-makers select innovative roadway strategies are routinely considered. Recent innovative roadway system improvements in Lexington include the double crossover diamond interchanges, roundabouts, variable lane uses, and adaptive traffic signal controls.

One major strategy to address congestion includes the provision and expansion of public transit. The Lexington Area MPO has developed a [Long Range Transit Plan](#), which will be updated in the near future. LexTran is the primary public transit provider. Ridership has continued to increase since 2004 when Lexington Citizens voted for a dedicated transit property tax. This provides reliable and continuing financial support so that LexTran can more proactively meet future demand. Experiencing yearly ridership growth, LexTran has experimented with different routing ideas, infrastructure, and amenity improvements to build ridership and to become a more attractive commuter choice. As with highway operation, LexTran is studying innovative methods, such as bus rapid transit systems and the possibility of designating and improving Nicholasville Road and South

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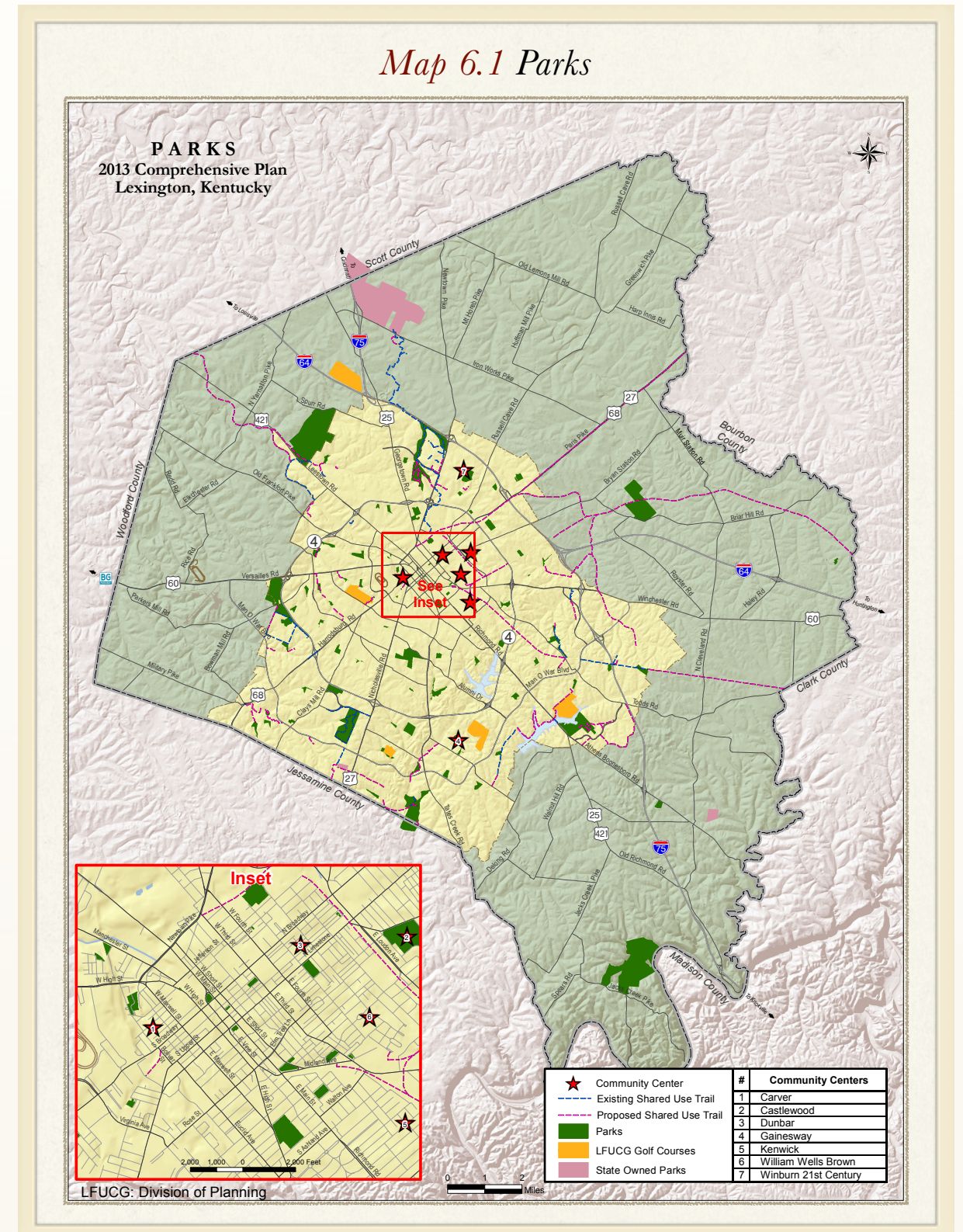
Limestone (U.S. 27) as a high capacity transit corridor to address congestion and enhance transit service.

Recommendations for new policies and strategies

- ❖ Design a complete streets policy that can be implemented in Lexington
- ❖ Implement the 2007 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- ❖ Devise a metric to calculate how traffic congestion will be reduced by new development or redevelopment along arterial and collector roads
- ❖ Use new and innovative techniques in operations and transit to address traffic congestion and travel demand, including but not limited to bus rapid transit options and high capacity transit corridors

Green Infrastructure and a Desirable Community

The Inner Bluegrass region is noted for its beauty and exceptional agricultural productivity. Green infrastructure continues to be key to Lexington's desirability. Our landscapes have expressed aesthetic, natural, historic, and cultural qualities highly valued for their social, economic and ecological benefits.



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How does Green Infrastructure contribute to a Desirable Community?

- ❖ Defines urban form
- ❖ Shapes and protects the natural, historic and cultural heritage
- ❖ Provides community identity and character
- ❖ Connects neighborhoods
- ❖ Provides recreational and leisure opportunities
- ❖ Reinforces values and environmental stewardship

- ❖ Consider the role of Green Infrastructure in all planning decisions
- ❖ Continue building greenway trails
- ❖ Protect existing green streets and construct new ones
- ❖ Find partners, such as schools, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to help with green programs
- ❖ Encourage walking and biking to schools
- ❖ Protect the rural landscape identity

For more information about Green Infrastructure, please see Chapter 4.

Urban Parks

While Lexington's rural landscape is expansive and intact, the urban landscape consists of small separate greenspaces. Public parks constitute the largest average of urban greenpace.

The [Division of Parks and Recreation](#) is responsible for a wide range of services, from conservation to community centers. Since the 1970s,

staff has concentrated on providing facilities for playing ball, swimming, and other programmed activities. In a local survey from 2008, respondents expressed an interest in a wide range of recreation facilities, such as a BMX trail, climbing walls, lacrosse fields, archery, multipurpose gyms, additional skateboard and dog parks, public access for boating, fishing, more non-programmed greenspace, and senior centers. Respondents' primary concern was maintenance. The number one wish was for more trails throughout Fayette County, including equestrian, mountain biking, park walking trails, and greenways. They also expressed a desire for bike lanes that connect within and between parks.

Parks are not static; they need to evolve continually in order to meet shifting trends, which are moving towards more individual or self-led activities. The Division of P&R wants to accommodate new trends while recognizing that the demands for ballfields and current programs must still be met.

As the remaining vacant land and infill opportunities are developed in Lexington, addressing park deficiencies and underserved areas while continuing to keep pace with new demands should be a priority. As with other public services, more partnerships and sponsorships are going to have an increasing role in funding and managing parks. The [2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) recommends that the Division of P&R create and identify opportunities for joint use facilities and for more flexibility to use parks spaces in multiple ways. The Division of P&R has a strong foundation to build upon its current partnerships with sports leagues and sponsors. In addition, there are four different Friends groups and a Park Advisory Board. The Division of P&R has

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an informal agreement about facility usage with Fayette County Public Schools when schools and parks are adjacent to each other.

Fayette County Public Schools provides a supplement to the parks system by allowing the community to use its lawns and playgrounds when students are not using them. many public school playgrounds are very active after school hours and on weekends.

The 2009 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update lists park development priorities. Land use recommendations include:

- ❖ Change from formerly ascribed standards of programming and location to customized parks based on the needs of the population a park serves
- ❖ Locate a sports field complex on the east side of Lexington
- ❖ Reclaim public greenspace in parks
- ❖ Locate and build the Downtown trail hub that will be the center for the primary east-west and north-south trails
- ❖ Link parks with greenway trails, especially in neighborhoods where car ownership is low and access to parks needs improving

For more information about open space and park planning, please see Chapter 3.

Other Recreation

Some of the large acreages for non-LFUCG recreational facilities include:

- ❖ Private and semi-public golf courses (1,269 acres)

- ❖ Race tracks (888 acres)
- ❖ Reservoir - fishing (428 acres)
- ❖ Fayette County Public Schools athletic fields (127 acres)
- ❖ UK and Transylvania athletic fields (89 acres)
- ❖ Private clubs (874 acres)

Trail Greenways

The adopted 2002 Greenway Master Plan proposed a system of trails to connect neighborhoods and the community to the region. Off-road trails are planned in stream, rail and utility corridors; on-road facilities link trails together. Implementation of the Greenway Master Plan accelerated after \$3 million in local bonds were allocated in 2008 and 2010 for greenway and park trails. Between 2007 and 2012, \$12.7 million were spent on greenway trail studies, design, or construction. There are now 24.5 miles of greenway trail with 28.8 miles of on-road trail connections. Addition trail projects are in various stages of development.

The popularity of the eight-mile **Legacy Trail** indicates that the public supports greenway trails. Of the 84 miles of remaining greenway trails proposed in the 2002 Greenway Master Plan, many may be difficult to build or not feasible at all, due mostly to geographic constraints or land ownership. Any reassessment of the current proposed alignments should recognize the benefits of a comprehensive network coupled with demand for trails from the public. Guidelines for streetscape design of on-road connections should be created to indicate their significance in the trail network and enhance the trail user experience. This may include sidewalk widths, lighting, wayfinding, benches, landscaping, street trees, traffic calming, bicycle lanes, or bike boulevards.

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Urban Streets

The [Greenspace Plan](#) recognized that the Bluegrass image extends to the visual experience of traveling city streets, which is why it recommended studies and guidelines for streetscape design. Tree-lined streets and planted medians are important urban greenspaces that contribute immensely to the visual character of an urban corridor. In particular, arterial streets designed as boulevards convey the message that the street is welcoming and an important civic space. Major corridors should project an image that is inviting and vibrant. This image should enhance the corridor's character and its role in creating a sense of place. Green planting strips and other roadside open spaces provide buffers to pedestrians and residential properties and gateways into neighborhoods. **For more information about trees and inviting streetscapes, please see Chapter 3.**

In the [Expansion Area](#)(PDF file), Scenic Resource and Special Design Areas are intended to minimize the visual impact of a development on an adjoining rural road. In both of these areas, clustered development and 200-foot setbacks from the rural road are required.

Complete Streets is a comprehensive approach to street design, including placemaking treatments such as:

- ❖ Boulevards that include medians, street trees, wide sidewalks, and bike lanes
- ❖ Street widths based on context of adjacent land use, which allows narrower street pavements where appropriate
- ❖ Options for eyebrows (a small loop street with a grassed island)
- ❖ Wider planting zones for taller trees
- ❖ Vegetated traffic circle at intersections of local streets

- ❖ Single-loaded streets at the urban service boundary, where houses are constructed on only one side

The portion of Richmond Road with median, mature trees, front-facing houses, and cohesive setbacks is a gradual transition to downtown and an exemplary example of boulevard design. There are other fine examples of green streets in Lexington that have medians, native plantings and low impact stormwater facilities, and extra-wide-right-of-way buffers. Several old rural cross-sections remain, such as Old Paris Pike and Spurr, Mason Headley, Armstrong Mill, and Mt. Tabor Roads.

Over the years, many of Lexington's state-maintained boulevards have lost their grassed medians due to maintenance budgets and demands for left turn lanes. Medians with grass, trees, or other plants provide benefits over asphalt or concrete medians, which include:

- ❖ Aesthetic (Richmond Road versus Versailles Road)
- ❖ Abatements to environmental issues, such as better stormwater absorption, improved air and water quality, and shaded pavement
- ❖ A break in the wide expanse of pavement, which gives the perception of a narrower street that helps to slow traffic
- ❖ Refuge for pedestrians to safely cross streets

Single-Loaded Streets

Single-loaded streets, where development is on only one side of the street, contribute to a desirable community in numerous ways. At the edge of the Urban Service Area, single-loaded streets provide the opportunity for connection to new neighborhoods should the USA boundary be expanded. Likewise, single-loaded streets around public parks and neighborhood centers, particularly village centers with a mix

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of uses, provide greater access to the public space and contribute to open space for high density development, such as the housing around Kirklevington Park. Single-loaded streets around parks and neighborhood centers have been developed for decades and are among the most desirable neighborhoods in Lexington, including Gratz Park and Bell Court. Other Lexington examples include Duncan, Woodland, and Castlewood Parks and portions of Veterans Park.

Single-loaded streets at the urban edge provide a hard buffer between incompatible uses (residential adjacent to agricultural) and enable the possibility of a greenbelt buffer with trails. The greenbelt could be a marketing tool for estate lots, much like the lots on Lexington's reservoirs.

Within developments, single-loaded streets are a tool to protect conservation greenways. Public use is constrained and maintenance and enforcement issues are exacerbated when the conservation greenway is minimally accessible. Two good examples of housing development on single-loaded streets around conservation greenways are Edgebrook Drive in the Squire Oak neighborhood and Willman Way near Hays Boulevard. Besides conservation benefits, these naturally treed greenways provide passive recreation opportunities for their neighborhoods and offer easy access for maintenance.

Schools

Fayette County Public Schools has 350 acres of greenspace on its campuses. Private schools have an additional 60 acres. FCPS has adopted a [sustainability plan](#), which includes creating indoor and outdoor green and healthy spaces as one of four goals. Objectives

within that goal include promoting and supporting the design and implementation of water mitigation tools such as rain gardens, green roofs, rain barrels, and stream restoration; promoting responsible planting of campus trees; and developing and promoting a school garden initiative. FCPS has two employees who work on sustainability issues. Recycling is done at most schools and FCPS is participating in local food initiatives.

There are numerous outdoor classrooms and outdoor learning labs, in addition to 37 schools that have or are planning a school vegetable, native plant, or rain garden. Interest is high, and local business partners, such as Lowe's, are providing support. Three of the five high schools have active outdoor clubs (hiking, fishing and archery) in addition to their green teams that mostly focus on energy and solid waste. Forty-two schools (with two more planned) participate in the [Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools Program](#), which allows outdoor project initiatives.

With Division of Water Quality stream restoration grants, Clays Mill Elementary students worked on Springs Branch and Mill Creek worked on its namesake. The completed stream restoration project at Mill Creek Elementary has become an outdoor classroom. LFUCG funded over \$1 million in grants between 2010 and 2012 to FCPS, private schools, and universities to improve water quality by constructing wetlands, building rain gardens, creating native plant gardens, mitigating stormwater runoff, cleaning litter, and developing curriculum. In particular, stream restoration grants were awarded for projects on Springs Branch at Clays Mill Elementary and the stream next to the Community Montessori School on Crestwood Drive near Southland.

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Traffic congestion around schools is a serious issue. There are 18,000 students, representing two-thirds of those eligible, who ride the bus. Most others are delivered by cars, which contribute to congestion issues around schools. Trails encourage walking and biking to school and can improve safety by reducing vehicular conflicts. Trails have been built at Liberty and Veterans Elementary Schools to link them to adjoining neighborhoods.

College Campuses

Higher education is an important component of a desirable community. UK and Transylvania have been integral to the composition of Lexington's landscape since their founding. The Universities of Kentucky, Transylvania, and Sullivan have nearly 230 acres of combined greenspace on their campuses, not including recreation areas.

UK is currently updating its campus [Master Plan](#). A survey from November 2012 indicated that students ranked the need for more outdoor recreation fourth out of 12 amenities listed. Faculty commented on the need to improve outdoor spaces, and consider the Arboretum as an asset. The new plan will look to improve stormwater management, campus character, and cohesion with enhanced outdoor formal spaces and gathering spaces. An assessment of existing open space extended off campus to identify opportunities for trail connections.

Cultural and Historic Resources

The 1994 Greenspace Plan describes greenspace as the essential characteristic that gives the Bluegrass its identity and quality of life.

Lexington's urban and suburban residents feel a close connection and appreciation for the farming culture.

Rural cultural resources recognized in the Greenspace Plan include farms, rural roads, stone fences, rural settlements, prime soil, stream, and natural areas. The Greenspace Plan identified Five Focus Areas that are considered to be exemplary examples of the Bluegrass landscape type. **For more information about Focus Areas, please see Chapter 7.**

There are 125 properties on the National Register of Historic Places, including houses, distilleries, warehouses, racetracks, schools, cemeteries, and churches. Protecting a landscape is a challenge because of its vast scale across many properties. Ordinarily, historic preservation is accomplished one site or district at a time. Existing protection mechanisms include:

- * Over 30 National Register Districts, of which seven are in the rural area. These districts include over 5,500 significant properties in the urban areas and over 11,880 acres of significant farm land and their structures.

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- ❖ 15 local historic districts (H-1) and two Local Landmarks in Fayette County for a total of over 2,200 properties. In the rural area, Helm Place has an H-1 overlay 15 local historic districts (H-1) and two Local Landmarks in Fayette County for a total of over 2,200 properties. In the rural area, Helm Place has an H-1 overlay
- ❖ Five areas with a Neighborhood Design Character Overlay, which is intended to regulate the visual character of a neighborhood within the general context of its architectural styles, aesthetic, or cultural significant. The [Study of Small Rural Settlements](#) (PDF link) recommended the overlay as a protection tool for rural settlements.
- ❖ **Downtown Design Excellence** (pending) will provide design standards for the Downtown area.

Recommendations for new policies and strategies

- ❖ Update the Greenway Master Plan to reassess proposed trail alignments and regional connections; identify the downtown trail hub
- ❖ Adopt regulations to create and protect green streets
- ❖ Determine a sustainable funding source for greenway trails, park projects, and maintenance
- ❖ Create a model to assess green infrastructure benefits and impacts from change
- ❖ Update the Greenspace Survey to ensure community values are known
- ❖ Customize parks to respond to adapting trends, demographics, and flexible uses
- ❖ Actively seek partnerships and formal agreements to fun green programs

Map 6.2 Historic Districts and Neighborhood Design

